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RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

THE 1976 ELECTION

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY HAS THESE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-SIX ELECTION:

VOICE: "HISTORY SEEMS TO HAVE SERVED UP THIS STRANGE GIFT FOR THE BICENTENNIAL" WROTE ONE REPORTER AFTER TUESDAY'S ELECTION. AND IT WAS INDEED STRANGE IN SEVERAL WAYS, THIS NATIONAL ELECTION TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER THE UNITED STATES BECAME A NATION. IT WAS WON BY A DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE WHO WAS ALMOST UNKNOWN---AT LEAST ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL---LESS THAN A YEAR AGO. IT WAS LOST BY A REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE WHO ENTERED THE WHITE HOUSE TWO YEARS AGO UNDER BIZARRE CIRCUMSTANCES---AND WHOSE TENURE THERE TURNED OUT TO BE ONE OF THE SHORTER ONES IN AMERICAN HISTORY. IT WAS ONE OF THE CLOSEST AND MOST EXCITING ELECTIONS ON RECORD---AFTER A CAMPAIGN WHICH WAS WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE DULLES. IT WAS AN ELECTION WHOSE RESULT ALMOST TURNED ON THE WAY A HANDFUL OF VOTES WERE CAST FOR A CANDIDATE---EUGENE MCCARTHY WHO REPRESENTED NO PARTY AND HAD NO CHANCE OF WINNING. IT WAS AN ELECTION IN WHICH THE CHOICE OF VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES MAY HAVE BEEN A CRUCIAL FACTOR. AND IT WAS AN ELECTION WHICH FOR A TIME SEEMED LIKELY TO PRODUCE THE LOWEST VOTER TURNOUT ON RECORD---ALTHOUGH IN THE END THESE FEARS PROVED GROUNDLESS AND THE TURNOUT WAS NORMAL.

BUT PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC FEATURE OF THIS BICENTENNIAL ELECTION---APPROPRIATELY ENOUGH, ONE MIGHT SAY---WAS THE FINAL ACT IN THE POLITICAL REUNION OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH WITH THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. ALMOST HALFWAY THROUGH ITS HISTORY---A LITTLE MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS AGO---THE "NEW NATION," AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN CALLED IT---WAS TORN APART BY A CIVIL WAR PITTING THE SOUTHERN STATES AGAINST THE REST. THE BITTER FEELINGS ENGENDERED BY THAT

CONFLICT LINGERED FOR GENERATIONS. BUT NOW THE UNITED STATES HAS A PRESIDENT FROM THE SOUTH. HE IS THE FIRST AMERICAN PRESIDENT TO COME FROM THE SOUTH SINCE BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR AND THE FIRST EVER TO COME FROM WHAT IS SOMETIMES CALLED "THE DEEP SOUTH." THE FACT THAT MR. CARTER---A WHITE SOUTHERNER FROM THE HEARTLAND OF THE OLD CONFEDERACY---WON MOST OF THE SIZABLE BLACK VOTE IS IN ITSELF A SIGNIFICANT COMMENTARY. IT DRAMATIZES NOT ONLY THE GROWTH OF RACIAL POLITICAL EQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES BUT ALSO HOW THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND THE TURN OF HISTORY HAVE BLURRED THE ANCIENT ANTAGONISMS.

A FINAL NOTE: IT MIGHT BE ARGUED THAT THE ALMOST EXACT SPLIT OF THE POPULAR VOTE BETWEEN THE TWO CANDIDATES REFLECTS A SERIOUS DIVISION IN THE COUNTRY, AND LEAVES MR. CARTER WITH NO CLEAR MANDATE. BUT THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARGUE TO THE CONTRARY---THAT THE CANDIDATES WERE NOT TOO FAR APART IN MOST OF THEIR POSITIONS, AND THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE SIMPLY CHOSEN A MODERATE LIBERAL OVER A MODERATE CONSERVATIVE. IN THIS VIEW, THE ELECTION HAS INDICATED NOT RADICAL DIFFERENCES BUT A SENSE OF BASIC VALUES HELD IN COMMON---AND MR. CARTER'S MANDATE IS TO DO HIS BEST TO TRANSLATE THESE VALUES INTO ACTION.

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